

Assessing Your Community for Horticulture Education Programming

Eric Barrett, Assistant Professor

Brian Raison, Associate Professor

Community assessments are an important and useful tool for program planning and community involvement in regards to horticultural education and community gardens. These assessments involve more than asking questions, they involve multiple forms of data collection from listening sessions to analyzing census data. It involves working with a wide range of organizations and institutions to gather the information that represents the entire community.

Key principles used in conducting community assessments include the engagement of the residents in the community, employing residents' skills and talents, and noting the strengths and opportunities based upon the talents and resources of the residents. Using these principles as a basis will help produce the best results for the future of a community and the engagement of the university in that community.

OSU Extension Master Gardener Volunteers conduct a wide range of horticulture and gardening programs throughout Ohio. These volunteers work with their neighborhoods and communities to conduct programs and events. Some programs are highly successful at meeting the needs of their communities. Others need additional help in meeting community needs. Not all programs use a community assessment in their programming. The adoption of this process can improve the programs and the workshops/events conducted by those volunteers.

There are several versions of community assessments that can be used with different volunteer programs to help them with their current programming. The important part in planning a community assessment is not the exact components, but the overall involvement of the community. This process of identifying the strengths, assets, needs and challenges of a specified community can help improve existing programs and help struggling programs gain insight necessary to connect to their local communities.

This presentation will review how community assessments were used in different ways in Ohio to provide direction for county Master Gardener Volunteer programs. The session includes details of why planning matters, what is a community assessment, how to conduct one, examples from the field, and results from a survey and discussion with county coordinators across the state.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand current practices and approaches to community assessments.
- Learn how to conduct a community assessment in local neighborhoods, communities and counties.
- Get the tools and information to use in conducting community assessments.
- Envision a process for assessing local communities to plan horticulture and community programs.

- Gain insight into OSU volunteer programs in horticulture and how they extend the reach of OSU research and education.

References:

Bauermeister, M., Swain, S., and Rilla, E. 2010. Marin County Community Garden Needs Assessment. University of California Cooperative Extension. Available online at: http://ucanr.edu/sites/community_gardens/files/75850.pdf

Smathers, C. and Lobb, J. 2014. Community Assessment. Ohio State University Factsheet CDFS-7. Available online at: <https://ohioline.osu.edu/factsheet/CDFS-7>

Washburn, L. T. 2017. Engagement of Health Volunteers: A Promising Approach for Meeting Community Needs. Journal of Extension 55(3). Available online at: <https://www.joe.org/joe/2017june/comm1.php>